

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply To:

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Instruction Memorandum No. MT-2003-080

Expires: 09/30/04

To: All Montana/Dakotas Employees

From: State Director

Subject: Montana/Dakotas Interview and Selection Policy

This memorandum updates the Montana/Dakotas policy for interviewing candidates for permanent, long term temporary, and TERM positions. Current policy is that all of the referred applicants on the list from where the final selection will likely be made must be interviewed by an Interview Panel, the Selecting Official, or both. However, the Selecting Official (SO) or designated Interview Panel are encouraged to interview applicants from all referred sources where practical. This policy is consistent with the guidance in the Bureau's Merit Promotion Plan, dated January 17, 2001.

Selecting Officials must make selection decisions based on legitimate reasons that are supportable. As you go through the interview and selection process, ensure the person selected is the best qualified candidate and retain documentation to support your decision.

In an effort to assist you in conducting interviews and processing selections for positions, the following is provided:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Once the Vacancy Announcement(s) closes, the Branch of Human Resources Management qualifies, rates, and ranks the candidates who applied for the position. For positions where there are a large number of qualified candidates, a rating and ranking panel is utilized. This process screens the best qualified candidates, and in most cases, reduces the number of candidates referred for consideration. Upon completion of the rating/ranking process, candidates are referred to the Selecting Official (SO) for consideration.
2. Upon receipt of the Candidate Referral Notice (for merit promotion vacancy announcements) and the Certificate of Eligibles (for delegated examining authority announcements), the SO makes the decision to personally conduct interviews or to establish a team to conduct the initial interviews. If the decision is made to use an interview team, the SO may identify several individuals (usually 3, but the number is up to the SO) to serve on the interview team. The interview team must contain at least one subject matter expert (SME). Other members of the interview team can be BLM employees, Federal employees from outside the agency, as well as individuals from outside the government. The purpose of the interview team is to conduct an interview with each referred candidate and to make recommendations to the SO of the top candidates

(usually 3 to 5, but the number is up to the SO) for the position being filled.

3. Interview team members must be completely familiar with the specific requirements of the position being filled and understand the interview process and procedures. The SO is responsible for briefing the Interview Team on the interview process and to communicate his/her expectations of the process to the team. The Human Resources Specialist responsible for staffing the position will also be available to assist in briefing the interview team. When interviewing for Law Enforcement positions, the Special-Agent-in-Charge (SAC), or his designated representative, must be a member of the interview panel. The SO is responsible for coordinating involvement of the SAC.
4. A list of the interview questions which highlight the expectations of the position will be prepared by the SO or the members of the interview team. Interview questions should avoid addressing basic qualifications; those items have already been reviewed by Human Resources.

Additionally, avoid questions requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer. Concentrate questions around the applicant's work and educational background, work habits, and leadership competencies, working as a team member, personal strengths and weaknesses, decision-making abilities, etc.

Interviewers may not ask about or discuss a candidate's race or ethnic background, color, sex, age, disability, religious beliefs, marital or family status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or labor organization affiliation or activity.

Interviewers should not identify hiring standards that are not job-related. The interview is not valid if the standards automatically screen out applicants whose speech, dress, hair length, social status, ethnic background, or personal lifestyle differs from the interviewer. Beware of tendencies toward stereotypical thinking. The principle of nondiscrimination requires that individuals be considered on the basis of individual skills and experience.

5. The same questions must be asked of each candidate. Often the response to one question will lead to another, which is a natural part of the interview process. These secondary questions do not have to be repeated to all candidates. Some interviewers provide the list of questions to candidates in advance of the interview to allow preparation time. This approach is optional.
6. Conduct the interviews with as much privacy as possible, usually in a private office or small conference room. In either case, schedule an appointment with the applicant, taking into account the best time to call and/or conduct the interview at the applicant's convenience.
7. Candidates may be interviewed either in person or over the telephone. It is recommended that interviews, to the extent practical, be conducted in person. If some candidates are not located within the local commuting area, they should be contacted by telephone. As long as all candidates are asked the same questions, there is nothing wrong with interviewing some candidates in person and others over the telephone. In some cases, a candidate will ask for a personal interview. If this occurs, the candidate is responsible for any expense associated with traveling to meet you for the interview.

However, if a SO makes a decision to personally interview a candidate in person who lives in another location, the SO is responsible for expenses associated with either traveling to meet the candidate or for bringing the candidate in for an interview.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW/CHECKING REFERENCES

1. Interviews should be conducted with all applicants on the list where a selection is likely to be made. If you are unable to contact an applicant (after 3 documented attempts), or an applicant withdraws, annotate the list and forego the interview.
2. Introduce yourself or the interview team to the candidate. Give the candidate a brief explanation of the position you are interviewing for and some general information about the city where the position is located.
3. Explain to the candidate that you have a standard set of questions and that you intend to take notes.
4. At the end of the interview, ask the applicant if he/she has any questions. Additionally, give the candidate the opportunity to add any additional information that would be useful. At the end of the interview, you may also elaborate on any items you would like to make the candidate aware of regarding the status of the position, work schedules, etc. End the interview on a positive note and let the candidate know when and how to expect a final decision on the selection.
5. The SO and/or interview team are strongly encouraged to contact references and/or current supervisors for each applicant who has been interviewed. However, in most cases, the SO only contacts the references of the top candidates referred by the interview team. This is an acceptable practice. Questions asked should relate to the applicant's duties, quality of performance, and work habits. You may also contact peers or employees in other agencies who have a working knowledge of the candidate's duties, quality of performance, and work habits.

MAKING A SELECTION

1. When referring the top candidates to the SO, consider all information including experience, education/training, awards, supervisory appraisals, references and notes from the interview. Remember that this process is confidential and should not be communicated to anyone other than the SO.
2. The SO has the option to conduct further interviews of any or all of the candidates or to make a final selection from the recommendations of the interview team. Additional interviews by the SO are recommended prior to final selection, but are not required. The SO still has the option to select any candidate referred for the position, even if that individual is not one of the top candidates recommended by the interview team.
3. Once a tentative selection is made, the SO should prepare a justification which documents why the person selected is the best person for the position. The justification should include the following information:

- Summary of Outreach conducted (reference the Individual Recruitment Plan if the outreach strategy outlined in this plan was followed), or summarize what outreach was conducted.
 - Method of recruitment.
 - Process utilized to interview candidates; indicate those candidates who were not interviewed and why.
 - Describe why the candidate is the best candidate for the position. Focus on specific qualifications and/or experience that make this candidate the best person for the position.
4. Submit the package (include the Candidate Referral Roster and/or Certificate of Eligibles), along with all original applications to the Human Resources Specialist responsible for the position (the HR Specialist will be identified on the candidate referral roster or Certificate of Eligibles) in the Branch of Human Resources Management. Upon receipt of the package, the Branch of Human Resources Management will review the selection and seek approval from the Associate State Director.
 5. Do not make an offer of employment until the Human Resources Office notifies you that your selection has been approved.

FOLLOWING SELECTION

SOs are encouraged to contact all candidates referred and inform them who was selected. You may also use this opportunity to discuss suggestions for improvement, areas of experience where a candidate was lacking, etc.

The Human Resources Office will notify all referred candidates for the position, via mail, within two (2) days of the selection approval of the candidate selected.

Any questions should be referred to Chuck Sandau, Acting Human Resources Officer, or any of the Human Resources Specialists in the Branch of Human Resources.

Signed by: A. Jerry Meredith, Associate

Authenticated by: Donna K. Zentz, MT-933